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THE CLASSICAL CLUB AS AN EDUCATIONAL AGENCY

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Beside schools and other institutions for the formal training of youth, many popular agencies are actively engaged in continuing the education of adults. The church, the press, the theater, the lecture-center, and the club justify their existence largely because of their educational aims and activities. In Philadelphia is a flourishing Society for the Promotion of Liberal Studies. Its name defines its purpose. In New York a classical club of six hundred members now enters upon the twentieth year of its usefulness. Greater Boston classicists have founded a similar one during the past year, and Cincinnati reports a club of five hundred members, which number it expects ere long to double. Every community ought to support such an organization with membership open to anyone who believes in the abiding value of the humanities, since knowledge of the splendid achievements of antiquity makes for higher standards in modern literature and art.

All true lovers of democracy and of the classics, and especially those of us who are concerned with the problems of education, are anxious to safeguard succeeding generations from loss of the heritage which we enjoy. By our creed the teaching of Greek and Latin ought to be compulsory in all academic institutions. (Please note that it is *teaching*, not *studying*, that should be compulsory.) And a knowledge of one or both of these languages should be required for entrance upon or pursuit of a college course leading to the degree of bachelor of arts. Thus every aspiring boy and girl would have a chance to learn something of the art life, the philosophic wisdom, and the political and social experience of the two greatest peoples of the ancient world; and the arts degree would be so standardized as always and everywhere to signify that its recipient possesses first-hand acquaintance with the literature and history of both ancient and modern times.

Furthermore, we believe that boys and girls of ability should be encouraged to undertake classical studies for both practical and cultural reasons. Whether a pupil should study Latin and Greek depends upon neither the social status nor the wealth of his family, since true democracy means equality of opportunity. His natural tastes and ability should be the determining factors, though economic conditions cannot be ignored. The handicap which poverty puts on some most promising students is a challenge for extraordinary exertion on their part and gives us opportunity for rendering generous assistance. Directing young minds is so serious a business and may have such far-reaching results that everyone should exert his influence that teachers be only men and women who show special fitness, and principals only those who are characterized by deep culture and wide vision.

We should undertake also to enlighten public opinion, constantly and systematically, as to the real value of the classics, so that parents and other advisers of children may realize that it is worth while to study Latin, even though it is hard, and be willing for those to elect Greek who show aptitude for Latin. The best way to gain popular adherence to the cause is for us advocates to mingle in social ways with opponents and neutrals, giving them the chance to know us and to see how sincerely we love our chosen subject. Nothing is so contagious as enthusiasm. The personal equation often supplies the determining factor in a problematical situation. The popular meetings of a classical club furnish the best opportunities imaginable for us to broadcast the good seed.

There is no denying that there is widespread disaffection toward Latin and even more so toward Greek, amounting almost to an epidemic. That opportunities for classical study are lacking in some of the western states is not surprising because in pioneer communities the pursuit of culture waits till wealth brings a sense of leisure. But we are alarmed at the lowering of standards for admission and the decline of classical studies in many of our older educational centers. Nowadays, if a chair in the department of philology becomes vacant by the retirement or death of the professor, many a university follows the short-sighted policy of saving money by not appointing his successor. It is true that Latin

recently has gained some students because of the unpopularity of German, but in New York City, at least, Spanish has outstripped Latin in number of students.

An inquiry as to the causes of these phenomena should precede attempts at remedy. The question is: Since Latin and Greek as instruments of education have so many advantages, both cultural and utilitarian, why do they not hold everywhere the place which they deserve? Their decline, it seems to me, is due chiefly to two causes—ignorance and apathy. These faults exist in many persons who profess to teach the classics, and are prevalent in non-pedagogic minds, due in the one case to narrowness and in the other to superficiality.

Teachers who through indolence disregard the claims of their profession deserve severe censure. An avowed exponent of classical study who fails to exemplify its virtues or promote its well-being injures the cause. The accusation that teachers lack breadth of view is not confined to those who teach Latin and Greek. In fact, they are often more appreciative of the historical significance of modern world-movements and are more conversant with current English literature than are many teachers of history and English who lack a classical background.

But the complaint that teachers are liable to fall into ruts seems justified by the fact that however enthusiastically young teachers begin their careers, the zeal of many wanes as the years advance and tenure of position becomes secure. This weakness does not develop if they become active members in a classical club and constantly renew their inspiration at its sources. Thomas Arnold, the great headmaster of Rugby School, when asked why in spite of the pressure of countless duties he read every day at least one page of classic authors, replied that he was resolved that his boys should drink not of a stagnant pond but of a running brook. The Reading League of Classical Teachers of New York State deserves the support of every club in the state and is worthy of imitation elsewhere. For details write to Professor Ball, of the College of the City of New York, who will gladly give information concerning it.

The cause of the general public's indifference to the claims of the classics is due not so much to narrowness as to superficiality.

Many self-satisfied persons who think their culture is broad are unaware that it is correspondingly thin. There is little hope of the ultra-modernist whose life-interest centers in mass and motion. He enjoys only the biggest or the swiftest things and is impatient of travel except in a racing-car or aëroplane and of sightseeing unless it be panoramic. He does not read even novels, preferring to see them dramatized at the picture-show, and he confines his thinking to questions of finance and of physical comfort. For him a Society for the Promotion of Liberal Studies has little attraction.

As an educational agency the classical club should include in its membership all teachers of Latin and Greek and teachers of other subjects who believe in humanistic studies, also members of boards of education, trustees of colleges, officers of administration, librarians, publishers, and, in short, all the men and women in a community who are willing to come under the influence that the club exerts. It invites the co-operation of sculptors, painters, architects, men of letters, and every one interested in the higher forms of art, and also engineers and students of pure science whose achievements make them appreciative of speculative thought. By expressing admiration for the master-minds of the past we encourage present-day artists and thinkers to do their best work.

When the club's membership has become large and representative, it should be printed. The pamphlet should contain the addresses and a few facts about the members that it may show the public how strong a body of advocates the cause of classics has. This list, being a miniature Who's Who, will be very helpful in conducting the business of the club, and will attract new members. It should begin with a short list of honorary members chosen because of conspicuous services to the club and to the cause which the club represents. It is desirable to have a long list of life-members, as they give stability to the club and their fees increase its endowment.

The machinery of organization should be simple at first but capable of expansion to meet growing needs. Efficient officers are essential, including representatives of colleges and secondary schools and non-professional members. The president should select with great care the chairmen of committees to look after the

club's various interests, such as sociability, membership and endowment, scholarships, publicity, co-operation with other organizations, and the forum.

The last-mentioned committee conducts those meetings of the club which are strictly pedagogical. These closely resemble in character of programs and audiences the regional classical association meetings and in no way conflict with them. Teachers predominate in attendance and the addresses are somewhat technical in subject and treatment. As discussion, not sociability, is the purpose of the forum, it is well to hold its meetings early on Saturday morning several times a year. This gives opportunity for conference, yet obviates the necessity of arranging luncheon for those in attendance.

As one of the chief aims of the general meetings is to promote social intercourse, they should be planned for mid-day with an hour's program before or after luncheon; or an evening meeting might be arranged in connection with a dinner. They need occur not more than two or three times a year, but they should be well advertised and should be held in an accessible and, if possible, a beautiful place. Much thought and effort are needed in planning and carrying out with success all regular meetings of the club, which should be freely open to the public. Convenience of time and place and appropriate social features must be carefully considered, no detail being overlooked—an auditorium with good acoustics, convenient cloakrooms, flowers for the tables, an appetizing though not elaborate menu, the presence of distinguished guests of honor, and an interesting program promptly rendered.

The addresses before the general meetings, being on a wide range of subjects, are intended to quicken the minds and broaden the views of teachers and enhance their usefulness as members of a democracy. They should be attractive also to persons who are not teachers and make them realize how widely classical influences permeate modern life and how true are Cicero's words: *Omnes artes quae ad humanitatem pertinent habent quoddam commune vinculum et quasi cognatione quadam inter se continentur.*

There is no lack of suitable subjects for the club to consider, since classical interests are of wide range. If the world's progress

in aviation is the predominant thought, Icarus and Daedalus, the pioneer aëronauts, though not wholly successful, serve to introduce the subject. If the topography of the world-war is under discussion, Caesar's *Commentaries* furnish a valuable guide-book. If Bolshevism engages our alarmed attention, we may review with profit the illegal methods and violent attempts of Catiline and his fellow-conspirators. Still broader in scope are such subjects as "The Humanist's Part in the Life of Today," or "The Debt of Modern Art to Ancient Greece," or "Latin in the Education of Engineers," or "Patriotism as Shown in the Classics."

To arrange the year's programs on appropriate themes is the first consideration of the president, helped by suggestions from the executive committee. He should secure as speakers men and women of outstanding ability, notable for public services or artistic excellence or scholastic and literary fame. No dignitary of church or state, no diplomatic personage or histrionic star above the club's horizon, is too high to be invited. A refusal of the invitation may come back in the inclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope, but in that case you have at least a famous autograph as a sort of consolation prize. It is no cause for discouragement if success does not attend all efforts. Instead of asking a single person to speak for the entire time of the formal program, it is wiser to invite several speakers to discuss some phase of the subject chosen for the meeting, allotting them fifteen or twenty minutes apiece. A celebrity who might decline if asked to speak for an hour, might consent to share the time with two or three other speakers whom he himself would enjoy hearing. One distinguished speaker secured for a program will attract others of like prestige.

One very laudable function of a club is to establish prizes for excellence in classical attainments and thus assist ambitious youth to further study. Such funds, wisely administered by trustees, will yield scholarship for graduates of schools who are the best students in Latin and Greek as shown by competitive examinations. The New York Club now gives semi-annually a Latin scholarship of \$150 and a Greek one of \$75, and hopes to increase them. They are available when the winners matriculate in college. It is interesting as an evidence of international good-will that Professor Gilbert

Murray, of Oxford, England, contributed the first \$50 to our Greek Scholarship Fund.

Offering prizes is not the only way the club can attract and encourage youth of ability to pursue classical studies. Leaflets and other suitable literature, such as reprints of wise editorials and convincing articles in the public press, should be circulated freely among the pupils about to graduate from the elementary schools. From this source they and their parents may learn the advantages of electing Latin as the first language in high school. This propaganda every classical club should carry on that the next generation may not lose the precious heritage through ignorance of its worth.

In these and countless other ways a classical club may be a means of spiritual life and light in a community. It is a rallying-point for all forces which contend for liberal and humane culture as against the narrow and enslaving tendencies of commercial and industrial cults. Guided by experience it will be able to assist the friends of classics whenever they ask help in the organization and development of clubs elsewhere. It is sure to welcome the formation of the American Classical League and co-operate with it as with all other organizations which promote the well-being of classical studies.